

Durham Academy

Address: Bracken Court, Ushaw Moor, Durham, DH7 7NG

Unique reference number (URN): 149251

Inspection report: 20 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Pupils' attendance has improved significantly over time. Rates of persistent absence have declined sharply. The gap between disadvantaged pupils' attendance and national averages is closing rapidly. This has been achieved through a consistent, determined effort by all stakeholders. Leaders understand precisely what the barriers are to high rates of attendance. They provide effective support to reduce these barriers and ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Staff work collaboratively with pupils, families and other agencies to ensure attendance remains as high as possible. Pupils enjoy attending school and appreciate the rewards they might receive for doing so. The main factor that makes leaders' work so successful is the high-quality wellbeing and emotional support available to all pupils.

Pupils understand what is expected of their behaviour and strive to live up to leaders' high expectations. The school environment is calm and purposeful. Pupils display resilience and enthusiasm. They respect one another's opinions and challenge disrespectful attitudes. In lessons, pupils engage well and focus on their learning. They ask meaningful questions. Disruption and removal from lessons are increasingly rare. Very few pupils are suspended from school. Pupils who sometimes struggle to regulate their own behaviour benefit from sensitive and highly effective support from staff.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have a deep understanding of the school's context and the challenges that pupils may face. They have a significant positive impact on the many pupils who face barriers to their learning and wellbeing during their time at the school. Before pupils join the school, significant additional work takes place. Pupils who join part way through their education are quickly identified for extra support should they need it. Transition visits, personalised support programmes and effective information-sharing ensure that leaders have a precise understanding of each pupil's needs. Close collaboration with families and external agencies helps to shape support for pupils. Pupils who attend the school's specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive bespoke support matched to their individual pathways and needs.

Staff continually develop their skills in supporting pupils with SEND and those pupils who are disadvantaged. Staff demonstrate an expert understanding of individual pupils and their specific needs. Leaders closely monitor the impact of their work. Plans to support pupils with SEND are reviewed and adjusted precisely.

There is a relentless commitment by leaders to enhance the experiences and opportunities provided to pupils. Staff ensure that all pupils are able to participate fully in school life. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from additional enrichment opportunities and excellent support for their emotional wellbeing. Leaders use the pupil premium funding to ensure that these pupils have equal access to a wide, rich set of experiences. Leaders' work has a very positive impact on pupils throughout the school.

Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the curriculum and how it is taught. The curriculum is regularly adapted so that it remains ambitious and relevant to pupils. Tailored support is in place for staff who are new to teaching or lack specific subject knowledge. This has had a significant impact on improving teaching. Lesson structures and sequences help pupils remember what they have been taught over time. Staff check effectively what pupils know and remember. This information is generally used well to inform future learning. However, this is not consistent throughout the school. Opportunities to extend and deepen pupils' understanding are not always taken.

Where pupils have gaps in important knowledge or skills, such as in reading or mathematics, this is addressed well. Pupils who come to the school unable to read fluently receive effective, targeted support. Work to improve pupils' written and oral communication is a priority for the school. The school has a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff typically make suitable adaptations in lessons to meet their needs. Pupils with SEND, including those who attend the school's specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND, follow an equally ambitious curriculum. Any adaptations to pupil groupings or lesson activities do not reduce ambition for pupils who face barriers to their learning.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. They have prioritised aspects that needed greatest focus and, in the main, have been successful in their efforts. Considerable improvements to pupils' attendance and behaviour, the curriculum and the personal development programme have been achieved. Leaders' decisions consider the impact on pupils, especially the most disadvantaged.

Staff workload and wellbeing are taken into account when changes are made. As a small school, many staff have additional roles and responsibilities. Leaders ensure that staff have the time, support and skills to undertake their roles. The professional learning programme is designed to respond to the emerging needs of pupils. For example, by focusing on support for high prior attaining pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The impact of professional learning is clear to see in classrooms and around the school.

Those responsible for governance carry out their roles effectively. They maintain an appropriate oversight of the school's work. Statutory duties are undertaken with rigour. Governors support and challenge school leaders in equal measure. A notable strength of the school has been the commitment to improvement priorities. Leaders' dedication to pupils' success has inspired the wider staff body to support this mission. The positive improvement journey of the school is clear to see. Leaders recognise where more remains to be done and are steadfast in their commitment to achieving this as swiftly as possible.

The school's personal development programme is carefully considered. It reflects the experiences and context of the school's pupils and their community. Leaders have identified precisely what pupils need to know and understand about significant topics. Tutor time, assemblies and personal, social and health education lessons develop pupils' financial awareness, tolerance of others and literacy skills. Pupils typically have an effective understanding of healthy relationships, online risks and fundamental British values. However, pupils' knowledge of other aspects of this curriculum is still developing, for example their knowledge of different faiths and cultures.

The importance of developing independence is prioritised by the school. The school's 'ACCESS' programme emphasises the importance of academic success as well as recognising self-worth. Pupils learn how to study effectively and to build resilience in their learning. The school's highly effective pastoral structure ensures that pupils get help that they need when they need it.

Pupils appreciate the importance of both physical and mental health. The school provides a wide range of enrichment opportunities. Leaders ensure that all pupils have equal access to these. The school week is structured so that every pupil takes part in a varied enrichment programme. This includes equine care, golf, orienteering, film studies and a go-kart challenge. Pupils also participate widely in clubs outside of school hours.

Leaders have designed a careers programme which is personalised to the specific needs and interests of the school's pupils. Leaders are aspirational for pupils and are aware of barriers to accessing ambitious post-16 destinations. Work experience, together with talks from employers and further education providers, helps to raise pupils' ambitions. Leaders do all that they can to support those pupils who are disadvantaged to reach their intended career goals. This work includes support in accessing university courses, sponsorship opportunities and holiday study programmes.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' attainment in national tests and examinations has not been as good as it could be over time. Too few pupils have secured the basic qualifications they need for future education, employment or training. However, the progress pupils make from their varied starting points has been more positive over time. Disadvantaged pupils' achievement is improving and close to their peers nationally. Gaps between different pupil groups are closing steadily. Despite this positive progress, leaders' actions have only recently begun to improve pupils' achievement overall.

Pupils' achievement within school has strengthened as curriculum and teaching standards have improved. More pupils now develop a more secure understanding of what they have been taught than they did in the past. The depth of this knowledge, however, is inconsistent

between subjects and key stages. It is too soon to determine the full impact of leaders' work on the outcomes of pupils.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

This is a small school with big aspirations for its pupils. Over time, many aspects of school life have improved significantly. These include pupils' attitudes to their studies, rates of attendance and the wider opportunities provided for pupils. Despite the school's high ambitions for pupils and increasingly effective classroom practice, pupils do not achieve as well as they might. This is particularly the case in national tests and examinations. Over time, pupils' attainment has been below average. The proportion of pupils achieving a strong pass in English and mathematics has been low. While many pupils do make positive progress from their starting points, this has not been matched by positive attainment. Leaders know that this is the case and are taking action to address this. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this work.

Pupils' educational experience is much better than it was in the past. The curriculum on offer and how this is taught continues to strengthen. Many pupils engage enthusiastically in their learning. Staff support pupils well so that they become confident in themselves and their abilities. Staff recognise the variety of life experiences pupils have. Careful consideration is given to ensure that all pupils thrive and benefit from high-quality support for their emotional and wellbeing needs.

Pupils behave extremely well in lessons and around the school. If conduct does not meet leaders' high expectations, it is swiftly and effectively dealt with. Pupils are absent much less frequently than they once were. They enjoy coming to school and feel safe. Pupils appreciate that staff know them well. They are confident that they have someone to speak to if something worries them. Pupils rarely experience bullying. If it does take place, staff do their best to resolve it. The school emphasises the importance of being kind and respectful. Older pupils are role models for their younger peers. Educational visits enhance the curriculum. These include trips to foreign countries and to local employers. Pupils are increasingly ambitious for their futures. The school community is proud of what it has achieved together to date.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills are closed rapidly so that attainment in national tests and examinations improves and pupils are better prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.
 - Leaders should ensure that their expectations of teaching are consistently well embedded across the school and that adaptations are used highly effectively for pupils.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Advance Learning Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Kelvin Simpson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alan Boddy.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders at the school. The lead inspector also met with the chief executive officer and governance professional of the trust during the inspection. The lead inspector met with those responsible for governance.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school includes provision for 14 pupils with specific learning difficulties, visual impairment, speech, language and communication needs or autism.

The school makes use of 2 alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

Headteacher: Alison Jobling

Lead inspector:

John Linkins, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Jacqui Johnson, Ofsted Inspector

Joanne Maw, Ofsted Inspector

Jessica McKay, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 20 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

396

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

693

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,152

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

62.12%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

6.06%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

28.79%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

Resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SpLD - Specific Learning Difficulty, VI - Visual Impairment, SLCN - Speech, language and Communication, ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health, PD - Physical Disability, MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	22.0%	45.2%	Below
2023/24 (final)	18.9%	45.9%	Below
2022/23		45.3%	

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	36.0	45.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	36.3	45.9	Below
2022/23		46.3	

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.25	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23		-0.03	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	25.7%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	18.5%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23		25.2%	

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	35.4	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	34.5	34.6	Close to average
2022/23		35.0	

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.37	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23		-0.57	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference

between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	25.7%	52.8%	-27.1 pp
2023/24 (final)	18.5%	53.1%	-34.6 pp
2022/23		52.4%	

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	35.4	50.3	-14.9
2023/24 (final)	34.5	50.0	-15.5
2022/23		50.3	

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.37	0.16	-0.53
2022/23		0.17	

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022 leavers (revised)	84%	93%	Below

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	12.7%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	12.9%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	13.1%	9.0%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	35.9%	21.9%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	42.2%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	46.9%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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